Daniel:
Crossway Bible Guide

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Crossway Books Leicester

CROSSWAY BOOKS
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First published 2005

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN–13: 978–1–85684–223–1
ISBN–10: 1–85684–223–1

Set in Palatino
Typeset in Great Britain by Avocet Typeset, Chilton, Aylesbury, Bucks
Printed in Great Britain by Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berks

Crossway Bible Guide

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Titles in this series

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Welcome!

These days, meeting together to study the Bible in groups appears to be a booming leisure-time activity in many parts of the world. In the United Kingdom alone, it is estimated that over one million people each week meet in home Bible-study groups.

This series has been designed to help such groups and, in particular, those who lead them. These Bible Guides are also very suitable for individual study, and may help hard-pressed preachers, teachers and students too (see 'How to use this Bible Guide', p. 10).

We have therefore enlisted authors who are in the business of teaching the Bible to others and are doing it well. They have kept in their sights two clear aims:

1. To explain and apply the message of the Bible in non-technical language.
2. To encourage discussion, prayer and action on what the Bible teaches.

All of us engaged in the project believe that the Bible is the Word of God – given to us in order that people might discover him and his purposes for our lives. We believe that the sixty-six books which go to make up the Bible, although written by different people, in different places, at different times, through different circumstances, have a single unifying theme: that theme is Salvation. This means free forgiveness and the removal of all our guilt, it means the gift of eternal life, and it means the wholeness of purpose and joy which God has designed us to experience here and now, all of this being made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Routes through Daniel

If you are leading a group or organizing your own study, you will probably want to make your own pattern. To get started, why not use the seven parts of this book and choose one study from each part. That will give you a good insight into the whole of Daniel if you do not have time to use every study.

Alternatively, you might choose a theme that could be covered in eight sessions, such as the following.

The challenge of standing up for God

Staying strong under pressure – Daniel 1:8–16
Changing the culture – Daniel 1:17–21
Standing for God whatever the consequences – Daniel 3:1–18
How did they stay strong? – Daniel 3:19–27
Explaining that there is only one God – Daniel 4:1–27
Being prepared to stand alone – Daniel 5:1–31
Determining to stay faithful – Daniel 6:10–18
Knowing God's Word – Daniel 9:1–19

God is all-powerful and all-knowing

God is in charge of human history – Daniel 2:1–23
God alone knows the answers – Daniel 2:24–49
All are subject to God's power – Daniel 4:1–27
There is only one true God – Daniel 4:1–37
God is in control – Daniel 5:5–31
The wisdom of the Ancient of Days – Daniel 7
God is judge of all – Daniel 7
The anointed one is coming – Daniel 9:20–27

Living faithfully

Standing for God whatever the consequences – Daniel 3:1–18
How do you stay strong? – Daniel 3:19–27
Journeying from theory to practice – Daniel 4:1–27
Journeying from pride to humility – Daniel 4:28–37
Living without jealousy – Daniel 6:1–9
How to pray – Daniel 9:1–19
Serious intent and humility – Daniel 10
On calling to an eternal destiny – Daniel 12

How to use this Bible Guide

These guides have been prepared both for personal study and for the leaders and members of small groups. More information about group study follows on the next few pages.

You can use this book very profitably as a personal study guide. The short studies are ideal for daily reading: the first of the questions provided is usually aimed to help you with personal reflection (see 'How to tackle personal Bible study'). If you prefer to settle down to a longer period of study, you can use groups of three to five studies, and thus get a better overview of a longer Bible passage. In either case, using the Bible Guide will help you to be disciplined about regular study, a habit that countless Christians have found greatly beneficial.

Yet a third use for these Bible Guides is as a quarry for ideas for the busy Bible teacher, providing outlines and application for those giving talks or sermons or teaching children. You will need more than this book can offer, of course, but the way the Bible text is broken down, comments offered and questions raised may well suggest directions to follow.

How to tackle personal Bible study

We have already suggested that you might use this book as a personal study guide. Now for some more detail.

One of the best methods of Bible study is to read the text through carefully several times, possibly using different versions or translations. Having reflected on the material, it is a good discipline to write down your own thoughts before doing anything else. At this stage it can be useful to consult another background book. See 'For further reading' on page 103. If you are using this book as your main

study resource, then read through the relevant sections carefully, turning up the Bible references that are mentioned. The questions at the end of each chapter are specifically designed to help you to apply the passage to your own situation. You may find it helpful to write your answers to the questions in your notes.

It is a good habit to conclude with prayer, bringing before God the things you have learned.

If this kind of in-depth study is too demanding for you and you have only a short time at your disposal, read the Bible passage, read the comments in the Bible Guide, think round one of the questions and commit what you have learned to God in a brief prayer. This would take about fifteen minutes without rushing it.

How to tackle your group Bible study

1. Getting help

If you are new to leading groups, you will obviously want to get all the help you can from ministers and experienced friends. Books are also extremely helpful and we strongly recommend a book prepared by the editors of this series of Bible Guides: *Housegroups: The Leaders' Survival Guide* edited by Ian Coffey and Stephen Gaukroger (Crossway Books, 1996). This book looks at the whole range of different types of group, asking what is the point of it all, what makes a good leader, how to tackle your meeting, how to help the members, how to study, pray, share and worship, and plenty of other pointers, tips and guidelines.

This book is a 'must' for all leaders of small groups. It is written by a team of people widely experienced in this area. It is available at your local Christian bookshop. If you have difficulty in obtaining a copy, write to Crossway Books, Norton Street, Nottingham NG7 3HR, UK.

2. Planning a programme with your Bible Guide

This guide is a commentary on God's Word, written to help group members to get the most out of their studies. Although it is never ideal to chop up Scripture into small pieces, which its authors never intended, huge chunks are indigestible and so we have tried to provide a diet of bite-sized mouthfuls.

If you want to get an overview of the Bible book in a series of meetings, you will need to select appropriate studies for each meeting. Read them yourself first and prepare a short summary of the studies you are tackling for your group. Ideally you could write it on a sheet of A5 paper and hand a copy to each member.

If you do not intend to cover the whole Bible book, choose a series of studies to suit the number of meetings you have available. It is a good idea to use consecutive studies, not to dodge about. You will then build up a detailed picture of one section of Scripture.

3. Preparing to lead

Reading, discussing with friends, studying, praying, reflecting on life ... preparation can be endless. But do not be daunted by that. If you wait to become the perfect leader you will never start at all. The really vital elements in preparation are:

- prayer (not only in words but an attitude of dependence on God: 'Lord, I can't manage this on my own')
- familiarity with the study passage (careful reading of the text, the Bible Guide study and any other resource books that throw light on it) and
- a clear idea of where you hope to get in the meeting (notes on your introduction, perhaps, recap what was covered at the last meeting, and what direction you hope the questions will take you in – don't force the group to give your answers).

Here is a short checklist for the busy group leader:

Have I prayed about the meeting?
What do I want to achieve through the meeting?
Have I prepared the material?
Am I clear about the questions that will encourage positive group discussion?
Am I gently encouraging silent members?
Am I, again gently, quietening the chatterers?
Am I willing to admit ignorance?
Am I willing to listen to what the group members say and to value their contributions?
Am I ready not to be dogmatic, not imposing my ideas on the group?
Have I planned how to involve the members in discovering for themselves?
Have I developed several 'prayer points' that will help focus the group?
Are we applying Scripture to our experience of real life or only using it as a peg to hang our opinions on?
Are we finding resources for action and change or just having a nice talk?
Are we all enjoying the experience together?

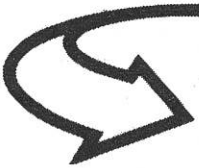
What can we expect to learn from Daniel?

How to:

- stand up for the truth in an alien culture
- persevere with good habits and customs despite discouragement
- accept great responsibility and fulfil expectations without compromise
- view our world in its long historical perspective
- pray on behalf of our fellow human beings
- approach difficult apocalyptic writings

Finding your way around this book

In our Bible Guides we have developed special symbols to make things easier to follow. Every study therefore has an opening section which is the passage in a nutshell.



The main section is the one that makes sense of the passage.

Questions

Every passage also has special questions for personal and group study after the main section. Some questions are addressed to us as individuals, some speak to us as members of our church or home group, while others concern us as members of God's people worldwide. The questions are deliberately designed:

- to get people thinking about the passage
- to apply the text to 'real life' situations
- to encourage reflection, discussion and action!

As a group leader you may well discover additional questions that will have special relevance to your group, so look out for these and note them in your preparation time.

Some passages require an extra amount of explanation, and we have put these sections into two categories.

Daniel in a nutshell

- *Chapter 1*: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are exiled to Babylon and trained to be civil servants. They refuse the official diet but are found to be better for their choice.
- *Chapter 2*: King Nebuchadnezzar dreams about a great statue. Daniel interprets the dream and is promoted to be ruler of the province.
- *Chapter 3*: King Nebuchadnezzar makes a golden image and demands that his people worship him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse and are thrown into a furnace. They emerge unscathed.
- *Chapter 4*: Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a great tree that is cut down. Daniel shows him that he too will be cut down. The king suffers a period of insanity but is restored.
- *Chapter 5*: A new ruler, Belshazzar, gives a feast and sees on the wall the writing of judgment. Judgment comes in the shape of an invasion by the Medes, Belshazzar is killed and Darius becomes king.
- *Chapter 6*: Darius decrees that anyone who prays to any god but himself should be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel continues to pray to God, is imprisoned but emerges alive, by divine intervention.
- *Chapter 7*: Daniel has a strange dream of four great beasts, which refer to human empires.
- *Chapter 8*: Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat, again interpreted in political terms.
- *Chapter 9*: Daniel's great prayer on behalf of his people, Israel.

- *Chapters 10 – 12*: Daniel's great vision. A man reveals, through apocalyptic images, what will happen in the future. An old man now, Daniel is promised rest.

INTRODUCTION

More than just a children's story

People often have two things in their minds when they think of Daniel. There's a story about some lions in a den and a story about 'my shack, your shack and a bungalow' having a bit of a problem in a fiery furnace. But Daniel is not just a children's story remembered from Sunday school; it has much to say to us as adults.

The book of Daniel is in two halves. The first is what might be called history, a description of some events that took place and stories to show us God at work in the world. The second part, sometimes called 'apocalyptic', is more like the book of Revelation or parts of Ezekiel, where there are some wild images and metaphors and it is very difficult to understand. To add to the complications, parts of the book are in Aramaic – unlike most of the Old Testament, which is usually in Hebrew.

When was Daniel written? Theologians have been arguing about it for a long time. The story happened about 600 years before Jesus was on earth and many think that that was when it was written. However, some people find it hard to believe in the unity of the book and believe it was written during the Maccabean period, about 200 years BC. Some believe the prophecies are so detailed and so accurate that they must have been written after the events they claim to be prophesying. This Bible guide takes a conservative view: that the book of Daniel emanates from 600 BC and that the apocalyptic bit is prophetic about the period

leading up to Jesus' birth and possibly even beyond. I believe Daniel to be a clear, biblical character who existed in history and made a significant impact in a major dynasty.

The name Daniel, like all biblical names, has a meaning (Daniel is his Hebrew name and Belteshazzar is the Babylonian name he is given), 'God judges'. The judgment of God is a key feature throughout this book. God's powerful, all-seeing eyes pervade the whole of Daniel.

Apocalyptic

When we come to apocalyptic literature, we must come without 'presupposition spectacles'. We mustn't come saying that we know what this means already. We need to be very careful and let the Bible speak for itself.

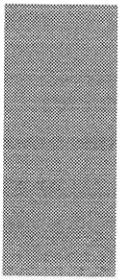
Apocalyptic literature is complicated, colourful and different. It is about beasts, kingdoms, colour, light and energy, and seems to make no sense at all. That is the difficulty with it. We read about a man going into a den of lions and not being eaten up, and we understand that. At least, we may not understand how it happened, but the story makes sense. But apocalyptic seems absurd. It didn't make much sense to Daniel (7:15, 28), so it's hardly going to make sense to us. It really challenges our minds because it addresses them in very different ways from the way history addresses them.

I remember when *Monty Python's Flying Circus* started. I watched it with my family. My sister and I would laugh and fall on the floor in hysterical giggles and our parents would sit through the whole thing wondering what on earth was amusing us. It went completely over their heads: they were not remotely impressed with this absurd sense of humour. Similarly, there is an illogicality and madness about apocalyptic literature that we have got to understand. It challenges our minds to think about Scripture in a different way. It is not logical, progressive

and historical, written in a way we might understand. On the contrary, apocalyptic offends our minds and confuses us, but that is perhaps a good thing because it reminds us that God is greater than human wisdom.

There have been those who have sought to interpret Daniel or Revelation in a detailed way. For instance, the kind of teaching I received when I was growing up equated Daniel 7 and 8 with the Common Market, because of the ten horns (7:7). The trouble was that when the Common Market started to enlarge, the whole theory imploded. So you have to be very careful. When reading apocalyptic, we need to be agnostic and not certain.

A good principle of Bible interpretation is this: where the Bible is clear, it is essential to be clear; but where the Bible is unclear, it is essential not to be clear. The Bible is certain Jesus is the Son of God, and it is certain he rose from the dead. It is certain about the moral rightness of particular ways of behaving. It is certain about the nature of God. It is certain about many things, but there are areas, and apocalyptic literature is one of them, where a veil seems to be drawn over our eyes and we have to live with uncertainty and doubt. If we try to impose on to this our interpretation of every detail, we will find ourselves getting into deep water. Sometimes the Bible is deliberately ambiguous and if we try to interpret it, we will be led into some weird pathways. Don't try to be dogmatic about what the Bible is deliberately obscure about.



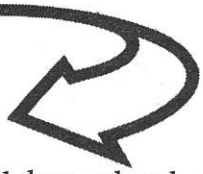
DANIEL, MAN OF THE MOMENT

Daniel 1:1 – 2:49

Daniel 1:1–7

Man in the right place at the right time

Apparently tragic circumstances may provide great opportunities.



The story begins about 605 BC. There seem to have been three Babylonian raids on the Israelites – 605 BC, 597 BC and then ten years later in 587 BC. The Babylonians put a puppet king in place and then, when he rebelled a little or didn't do what they wanted, they came and replaced him. In each raid various men and women, nobles and articles from the temple were taken over to Babylon, as a sign of victory. (The distance between Jerusalem and Babylon, close to modern Baghdad, was about 966 or 1,287 kilometres [600 or 800 miles], depending on the route taken.)

Understandably, then, the Babylonians thought they were unstoppable. Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful dictator, but Daniel's name reminds us that despite the awesome potency of this global power, God was the judge. It's good to remember today that political muscle, global power, the weight of any nation or of all the nations acting together is nothing compared to God who is judge and ruler of all the earth.

The king needs servants (verses 3–7)

The king needed young men set apart for a special training programme (which seems to be a combination of a health farm and a university). There are two places in the Bible where people are taken and given these mental and physical beauty treatments. One passage deals with

women (at the start of the book of Esther), and this one deals with men. Young men are to be found without defects (does such a man exist?), and they must be physically strong and quick to understand. There had to be a level of intellectual ability as well to qualify one to serve in the king's palace.

The king wants to recruit these men for a clever reason. War is one thing for a dictator to prosecute, but running a peaceful empire is a much trickier business. Consequently, one of the best ways is to integrate the cream of the cultures you have conquered and force them to serve by inclusion. That's what's happening here. These men are taught the language and literature of Babylon and the customs of the day. They are taught to be aware of the history of the Babylonians as well as science, mathematics and some of the Babylonian occult practices.

The king assigns to them a daily ration of 'royal food' (verse 5) and then, to make inclusion complete, he gives them different names (verse 7). Actually, this is a highly manipulative and controlling thing. If someone tries to change your name, it implies a seismic shift in who you are. When a woman in our culture gets married, it's a big change from being a single woman, historically under the protection of her father, to being a married woman, historically under the protection of her husband with a different name. So when an emperor forces a new name on you, it shows his domination of your life. This was particularly difficult for Jews whose whole identity was wrapped up in their name.

Culture shock

It was a huge change for these four vulnerable young men (Daniel was probably only about 16–19 years old at this stage), snatched away from their families. Daniel and his friends want to stand up for Yahweh, the Hebrews' name for the one true God, and they want to be different in this world. Then along comes the king who sucks them into a regime that reminds them they're in a different country,

which pushes a different religion down their throats, which changes their custom of behaviour by teaching them about Babylonian history and not Jewish history, and exposes them to a different culture with special food, and gives them a different name.

Students find themselves in a comparable situation when they leave home to go to college. They're in a different location, all the security is gone, the whole culture of college is alien to them and they can feel desperately alone. Some of us, and missionaries, have also felt this when we've moved overseas.

Even worse, Daniel and friends had a different religion to cope with, too. The Babylonians weren't worshipping the one true God: the religious framework was different. Nowadays, in so-called civilized Western society faith is no longer central to most people's lives. Broadly speaking, we are in a culture that doesn't share our spiritual values and therefore we find what Daniel and his friends found: that standing up for our faith is sometimes tough because the prevailing religious view is materialistic, or something else, but certainly not passionate Christianity.

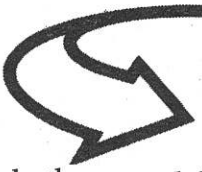
Questions

1. Compare what we have learned of life in the Middle East in 600 BC with life there today. What is different? What is similar? How does it help us to understand Daniel's plight?
2. How is the situation of Daniel and his three friends comparable to that of students today? How can we support them?
3. How far should people from overseas preserve their traditional culture and religion and how far should they adopt those of their new homeland? Consider the British in India, for example, and the Indians in Britain.

Daniel 1:8–16

Dieting with a purpose

In challenging circumstances we need to know where not to compromise our principles.



Everything is different for Daniel and his friends. They're in a different country with a different religion, different customs and even different names. How do they stand firm in this alien culture? Daniel has learnt to compromise at all sorts of levels (without compromising his essential faith), but there comes a point where he isn't prepared to cross the line. 'But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine' (verse 8). In Hebrew the word 'resolved' is a strong word, which literally means, 'he purposed in his heart with determination'. Daniel was absolutely clear on this. It mattered that God was not dishonoured in his life. This mattered more than being handsome, well educated, serving the king or being fantastically blessed. He had about him a passionate resolve to be God's man in an alien world. May God raise up Daniels among us to stand firm against the culture that denies our values.

I remember a chorus I learned as a child:

Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose true, and dare to make it known.

Dare to stand alone. Wherever we are, in the office, on the train, in the car, whatever we do, we're in an alien culture and we need resolution and determination to stand up for Jesus. We won't stand firm without it.

Where to draw the line?

So why did Daniel resolve to go without the royal food and wine? Why did he draw the line there? We're not 100% sure, but it's likely that the Babylonian diet at that time included both horse meat and pork, which for religious reasons the Jews could not eat. Perhaps if they were to eat that it would have been the final straw in tying them to the king's court and selling out to all the values of the day. We all have lines we do not cross. Different Christians draw that line in different places, but there will always come a line. It's an issue we face every day, perhaps with non-Christian colleagues or a non-Christian boss: should we work for that company or not? Or the classic case of Eric Liddell, who refused to run an Olympic race on a Sunday.

Daniel and his friends drew the line at royal food, and were determined to do the right thing. They were given the resources to be able to do it (verse 9, God caused the official to show favour to Daniel). This wasn't just an idiosyncratic lucky break: God had decided to do it. God was involved. He controls the destiny of the universe, whatever the Nebuchadnezzars of this world think about it. So there wasn't just resolution on the part of Daniel; there were resources. In other words, God's power.

When you determine to stand firm for Jesus (in the home, the workplace or wherever), you're not just doing it on human resolution alone; you're doing it by the power of God. Pray to be filled with the Spirit of God to have the power to stand alone.

Questions

1. If you were deported to a strange, hostile land, what steps might you take to preserve your integrity? What lines would you draw to be faithful to your own way of life? Where would God want those lines to be drawn?
2. How far should Christians set out to be different from

those around them, and how far strive to be like everyone else, so that they are not perceived as odd? Will the answer depend at all on different personalities?

3. What evidence is there that God is in control of today's world?

Daniel 1:17–21

Daring to be different

When Christians stand firm for their principles, they can begin to change their surrounding culture.

The chief official agreed to a ten-day trial period of a separate diet (verse 14). And at the end of the ten days Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the other young men (verse 15). So the official, much to the chagrin of the others, took away their drink and fancy food and put them on a vegetarian diet. I don't think Daniel would have been very popular. But God honoured the choice he made.

Daniel stood firm and drew on God's resources, and discovered that those around were drawn to his values. This challenges us, not just to live for Jesus in our workplace, but progressively to make the place we're working in have more Christian values. Most Christians are grateful just to be left standing at the end of the day, but Daniel wanted to be left standing (drawing on the resources of God) *and* shifting the culture in which he found himself. That's our job, too: to be a glorious disinfectant to change the culture of our part of the world by the power of the Spirit. No less a challenge faces the church. We're not made to resist all attacks in defensive

mode, but to be in aggressive mode to change things around us.

The proof of refusing the pudding

At the end of the time the king got to meet all the young men (verse 18) and found that Daniel and his friends had no equal. In all matters he found them ten times better than all the others from the whole kingdom. Wow! When we *do* stand firm and draw on God's resources and we *do* begin to shift the culture, it becomes clear that God's way is the best way. There's no question about it: vast numbers of social and personal problems in our culture would be hugely changed for good if people adopted Christian values. A Christian view of sex and sexuality would largely eradicate the sexually transmitted diseases epidemic; a Christian commitment to marriage would see an arrest of family breakdown; a Christian view of raising children would mean a huge difference to the way children are disciplined ... the list goes on.

So the call to us is to stand firm, not in our strength alone, though we need resolution. We must stand firm in God's power, recognizing that this does seem an alien culture to us. We are just passing through, but *while* we're passing through our job is not to live in isolation in the ghetto of the church that fears everything around it, but to live in the splendid confrontation of a Daniel that dares to be different – to live in such a way that those around us are drawn into God's values.

Questions

1. How far have we the right to impose what we see as God's way of life on other people? List some examples.
2. How can we, as a church/fellowship expect to change the culture of the place where we live?
3. Why do predominantly Christian nations, led by Christian men and women, not change the world

for the better? Consider the two world wars in the last century.

Digging deeper: Could there be a Christian state and would it work?

Christians often say that if only we had a totally Christian society, all would be well. They may be right, but is such a society possible? The story of the English Commonwealth in the mid-seventeenth century suggests that it is not as easy as it sounds.

Oliver Cromwell's government was avowedly Christian. Puritan soldiers and MPs based their lives and their arguments squarely on the Bible. Prayer was a vital part of all decision-making. It seemed that heaven had come to earth at last.

Yet that Christian power was held in place by the military. It felt compelled to execute the king, Charles I, who was himself a devout man – the only saint the Church of England ever canonized. Major generals were employed to enforce strict moral rules on the people and to prevent them from celebrating Christmas. Devout factions quarrelled and quoted Scripture at one another. Cromwell felt that he was 'a poor constable set to keep the peace of the parish'. But he could do that only by force of arms and his powerful personality. Within two years of his death England welcomed Charles II to the throne, and few would describe him as a saint.

It begins to look as if we need not just saints but perfect men and women to create a perfect society. Even Christian leaders are faced with impossible choices. Which is more Christian, to leave in place a ruthless dictator who terrorizes his people, or to invade his country contrary to UN resolutions? A Christian leader opting for justice, without considering the price of oil, might not be re-elected.

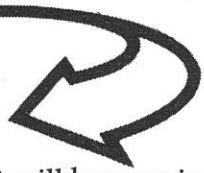
This side of heaven there are no simple answers, but we

are still called upon to do what we can to promote a relatively just society. If Christians give up, who will take up the challenge?

Daniel 2:1–23

Nebuchadnezzar's bad dream

People who wield absolute power are dangerous: the more so if they are irrational and unstable.



In the second year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled; he couldn't sleep. The mix of the cosmic and the ordinary in this book is remarkable. We're told about what will happen in the future, and then we hear about a man who can't sleep! How many people relate to that? We can't sleep because our minds are overly active, or we're worried about something.

Nebuchadnezzar can't sleep because he's had a dream (verse 1). So he summons his enchanters, magicians and astrologers (in the middle of the night, it seems) to tell him what he's dreamed (verse 2). To make sure they're not making things up as they go along he gives them a supernatural challenge: 'Tell me what my dream was and tell me what it means!' Understandably, the astrologers complain and beg to know what the dream was before they interpret it, but Nebuchadnezzar is resolute (verse 5). The Hebrew is strong here: they must tell him the dream and the interpretation; otherwise they will be cut to pieces!

Where is wisdom?

This is an impossible and irrational request, but the king is questioning their power. He wants to test his advisers to find out who knows what. Nowadays we tend to think (wrongly) of wisdom as knowledge and academic achievement, but in the ancient world wisdom was often seen (also wrongly) in occultic terms. That is why the advisers are called astrologers and enchanters: their insight was received from various gods or from obscure rituals. But when they are faced with Nebuchadnezzar's request, their human wisdom fails and occult power falls short.

There is a danger that some people seem to believe that Satan is all-powerful, but it's just not true. Occult power looks attractive and many people get involved with dark forces, but Daniel reminds us that there are distinct and clear limits both to human wisdom and the insight that comes from evil powers. There is a block beyond which *they* can't go, but the God of the universe *can*. There are lots of powers in the universe, but only the power of God is strong enough. By this test Nebuchadnezzar isolates and identifies that all the wisdom in the world, all the book learning, all the knowledge and all the black arts will come to nothing when faced with this dilemma. There are limits to human wisdom and occult power, but there are no limits to divine wisdom and God's power. Consequently, the astrologers can't help Nebuchadnezzar. So in his fury he orders the execution of all the wise men in the country, which includes Daniel and his friends (verse 13).

Daniel asks the king for more time, and then goes away to pray. As Daniel prays, God reveals the dream and its interpretation to him (verse 19). So Daniel praises God, acknowledging that there is no limit to divine power (verse 24). Nebuchadnezzar is not as powerful as he thinks he is. In fact, he's about to hear a vision about the breakdown of his political power and that of generations following him. We sometimes think all power is political, military or economic, because that's the way it looks in our world. Here we learn that only God has the power to

take nations or kings and exalt or tear them down. The book of Daniel reminds us that God, not the nations, is in charge of human history.

Questions

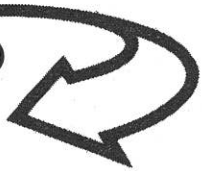
1. Where do you look for wisdom and guidance? How reliable do you find them to be in practice?
2. How real are the occult powers? Share any experiences you have had/heard of concerning the dangers of astrology, seances, witchcraft, spiritism and so on. Why should Christians avoid them?
3. Can we learn anything from the past, or does each problem situation have to be worked out afresh? Share examples from everyday life and from national and international affairs.

Daniel 2:24–49

Daniel interprets the dream

God alone knows the answers because he is in charge of history.

God reveals the mysteries (verses 24–30)



Daniel meets Nebuchadnezzar and explains to him that only God can reveal mysteries, it is not something man can do. Daniel is at his entrepreneurial best here with a gospel presentation of the true God. He tells Nebuchadnezzar, 'There is a God who reveals mysteries.' In other words:

Nebuchadnezzar, you are stuck, you are worried by this dream and no-one knows the answer, but there is a God in heaven who can give you an answer to the question 'Why?'

That profundity of Daniel has been the salvation of Christians in despair for years. It seems that as we grow as Christians, the more questions we have. Things aren't as simple as they used to be, and the questions get deeper and more intractable: 'Why is my friend dying?' or 'Why is my child sick?' or 'Why are all these things happening in our world?' The question 'Why?' has no obvious answer. And to all of these Daniel gives the answer 'I don't know why, but there is a God in heaven.' In other words, there are lots of things to which the answer is unclear, but because there is a God in heaven, one day all mysteries will be revealed. Part of faith is waiting to know why, until the day when all darkness will be as light and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. God is in heaven and is in control, whatever else things look like, however else things seem to be. It's a challenge to us to live in the present, with the certainty of the Spirit within us. One day perhaps all our questions will be answered – or shown not to matter any more.

There is a poem that reflects on the mystery of the universe and lack of answers to the question why:

> My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me,
> I cannot choose the colours he worketh steadily.
> Oft times he weaveth sorrow and I, in foolish pride,
> Forget he sees the upper and I the underside.
> Not till the loom is silent and the shuttle ceased to fly
> Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reasons why.
> (Anon.)

The dream explained (verses 31–47)

Daniel describes to Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was. It's a stunning vision that shows God in charge of history.

The gold head of the statue represents Nebuchadnezzar, and every succeeding dynasty will end up decaying until the rock not made by hands will come and destroy it all. Students of prophecy have gone into great detail interpreting this dream, but what we need to know here is that some of it is fulfilled in the period leading up to Jesus (the dynasties unravelling), and some of it is fulfilled as the rock (Jesus himself). Jesus will fully establish his kingdom, not made with hands, and all other kingdoms will be wiped away.

The world is tending towards disorder and decay, but God's kingdom, which will establish a different order, is coming. God is in charge of human history. That is what Daniel is telling Nebuchadnezzar: 'God is the God who sets kings up and takes them down. You might think you are the dictator of the most powerful kingdom in the world, but you are nothing. You are in God's hands and history is working itself out for his benefit and not for yours.'

We need this faith-building reminder whenever we come to pray. The temptation is to despair as we pray, believing that despite years of faithful prayer nothing ever seems to change. We pray for Northern Ireland or for the Arab–Israeli conflict, but there seems to be no difference. Yet Daniel reminds us that God takes the long view of history. The nations are in his hands. It is what God wants that will come to pass. God is in control of the nations of the world and God is in control of human history. So don't stop praying for the nations of the world. You would be amazed how quickly things can change. Sometimes it takes years for things to happen, but God is at work changing our world. So don't give up. Don't stop praying. Don't stop interceding: our nations need changing. Pray with faith, because God is running the world.

The king honours Daniel (verses 46–49)

After the interpretation of the dream Nebuchadnezzar falls prostrate before Daniel, pays him honour and glory and makes him prime minister. Moreover, at Daniel's

request, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego become administrators over the whole province of Babylon. What a fantastic opportunity that is! Let us pray for God to raise up Daniels in significant roles (in politics, world affairs, the media, the arts etc.), where they can have an influence for God.

Questions

1. Write a letter to someone who has told you, 'I have tried prayer for a long time and it doesn't work.'
2. How significant are dreams? Does God use them? Share examples from your own experience and from the Bible (e.g. Jacob, Genesis 28:10–22; Joseph, Matthew 1:20–25).
3. Daniel's interpretation of the dream envisages God taking a dramatic part in human history (e.g. verse 44). What evidence is there that God has intervened in our history since biblical times? How can we decide whether an event is influenced by God or not?

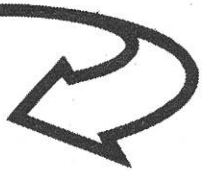
THE RISE, FALL AND RISE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Daniel 3:1 – 4:37

Daniel 3:1–18

Bow or burn

Real faith means trusting God, whatever happens, not just when we find peace and comfort in return.



Many people will know this story because they heard it in Sunday school. Nevertheless, it is a story with an adult and abiding lesson.

Nebuchadnezzar provides a focus for worship (verses 1–7)

Over twenty years have passed between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. Daniel himself is not mentioned in this chapter (perhaps he is away on foreign business), but it seems significant that Nebuchadnezzar chooses this moment to build an idol. He builds a fantastic golden image, probably a monument to his patron deity, the god Nebu. Had he forgotten all that Daniel told him or was his new wisdom only skin-deep? The interpretation of his dream should have resulted in Nebuchadnezzar coming closer to and trusting God for himself, but the king seems conveniently to have forgotten certain elements of the dream. The truth is that we, too, can have great revelations (or indeed fabulous music and worship), but unless they meet with a determined and long-lasting response from our hearts, they are useless, just as they were with Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten that it is God's kingdom that will fill the earth, and not his own. He remembers that Daniel said Nebuchadnezzar would be the golden head of the empire, but he has forgotten that the empire will one day crumble. Instead, he embarks on a programme to

strengthen the inherent weaknesses in his reign by making people worship an idol. This will help to unify the whole nation and reinforce his leadership.

No compromise (verses 8–15)

Some astrologers come forward to report to the king the disobedience of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Were these astrologers jealous? There are always those who hate success and godliness in others. There will be people who despise you because you are a Christian, and so they will criticize you. Don't be surprised by it: Jesus told us to expect it. If you live a life for Christ, you will be persecuted and picked on.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are given one more chance to bow to the idol (verse 15); otherwise, they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Have you ever wondered how you would stand up to persecution like this? How would you cope if this were ever asked of you?

I remember my college principal saying, 'God only gives dying grace when you have got to die.' He doesn't give dying grace when you are *worried* about dying; he gives dying grace when you *need* to die. He gives bereavement grace when you have been bereaved or when you are grieving. He gives all sorts of grace just when you need to have it. He gives unemployment grace or redundancy grace or illness grace when you need it, but not at the time when you are wondering how you would cope with it. This encourages us to seek grace as we need it.

Amazing faith (verses 16–18)

The reply of the friends is remarkable. They believe God will save them; *but even if he does not,* they will not bow down. History is punctuated with stories of God's people suffering as a result of refusing to compromise their belief in God. It is said that there are more Christian martyrs today than there were in AD 100. In fact, it is estimated that 165,000 Christians were martyred in the year 2000 alone.

Day by day Christians throughout the world are forced to take their stand and pay the ultimate price for Jesus Christ. Mercifully, few of us will be called to make that kind of sacrifice, but the way we respond to everyday situations in the home or the workplace or at school now will determine how we meet the great challenges. Our responses to the ordinary problems of life will determine our spiritual formation, how we stand up to greater pressure or whether we fall.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not buckle under pressure. Instead, they responded with a tremendous declaration of trust and determination to trust. Whatever happened, they were not going to turn away from God. And what about us? Are we determined to trust? Do we trust God to find us a job or give us a child or heal us from a disease? Even if he doesn't, are we determined not to turn our backs on him? The God we serve is worthy, and he deserves our praise. He has already done the remarkable thing by coming to this earth and dying and rising for us. Our part of the equation is to trust.

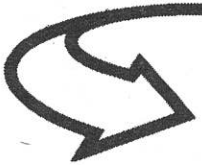
Questions

1. Imagine you are under threat of death if you do not renounce Christ. Pray for the strength to do what is right in that situation and to live now close to the Lord who gives that strength.
2. Nebuchadnezzar erected a monument to his god. What kind of spiritual building are we erecting to the glory of God? Who can see it?
3. What room is there for many races and religions existing together in one country? If all believe they are right, is strife inevitable? Or how can we enrich one another?

Daniel 3:19–27

The ever-present Saviour

The usually invisible power and love of God become human for us in times of greatest need.



Faith that works (verses 19–27)

After refusing to bow to the golden image, the three friends are sentenced to be thrown into the furnace – which is especially made seven times hotter than usual. Suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar leaps up in astonishment because he sees four men walking around in the fire unharmed. God has delivered the three friends! They are able to walk out of the furnace, and Nebuchadnezzar sees the power of the God of Israel. But why didn't he recognize God's power after Daniel's interpretation of his dream? Why does it take the fiery furnace to convince Nebuchadnezzar of God's reality?

Some people, like Nebuchadnezzar, are only going to believe when they see the Son of God with you in the furnace. Some people will need to see a furnace and see you coming through that furnace to see the reality of your faith. People are no longer interested in the cerebral or in closely reasoned theological arguments. The one thing they need to see is that your faith works. They need to see that it means something to you and that it's worth paying for.

Remaining strong in times of trial

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were free, but what had sustained them? What enabled these men to be so

strong in these afflictions? What will sustain us when trials come upon us? First, they belonged to a small group: they were not on their own. Throughout the pages of Daniel the three are mentioned together. They are mentioned together because they are an identifiable group standing together, supporting and encouraging each other. Small groups are important. Sometimes on our own we are weak and it is easy to lose faith, but with others around we can be strengthened. We are better together: stronger, more faithful and with more tenacity.

The three friends made good decisions early on. Despite all that was thrown at them, being taken into exile, having a new culture and name thrust upon them, they made up their minds that they would hold on to their faith. It was the faith of their fathers and they were not going to give it up. They referred back to the God who brought their forefathers safely out of Egypt. They focused on Scripture and it enabled them to remain strong. Consequently, they knew that God is a caring God, an awesome God and a powerful God. They knew, too, that he is not geographically restricted and was right there with them. So they were not going to allow their circumstances to persuade them that God had left and forgotten them.

What is the first thing we often think about when going through the fires of affliction? 'I have done something wrong: God must have forgotten me. God loves all the rest but he doesn't love me.' Not once do we hear Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saying such things. They were sustained by God's words. Their knowledge of God kept them strong. And God will give us that same tenacity to believe. God can bless, meet and keep us strong even in the most awful circumstances – even if we have to pay the ultimate price.

So, who do you kneel to and honour? Who pulls the strings in your world? Is it the god of Nebuchadnezzar or the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? I call you to kneel to this God and find him to be sufficient for all your needs.

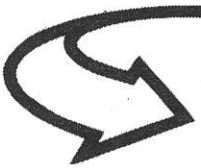
Questions

1. There are many idols in today's society. What is most important in your life? Make a list of the top ten things/people/happenings. Make a note to review the list regularly.
2. The Christian group/fellowship/church is stronger than the sum total of all its members. How can we promote groups and encourage people to join them? How, then, can we help those outside who feel left out?
3. The 'fourth man' (verse 25) has often been identified as the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He is not often visible to us. Where is he in the world of today? Do you think he has any 'no-go' areas? Why?/Why not?

Daniel 4:1–27

From pride to humility

The powers that be are often much more fragile than they look.



Another bad dream (verses 1–27)

This first half of the chapter is in the first person, as Nebuchadnezzar writes his own testimony to the world. Nebuchadnezzar tells us the story of who God is for him. All of us have testimony stories as we think about our discovery of who God is. Nebuchadnezzar has a perplexing dream again, and so he calls in his advisers once more. This time Nebuchadnezzar is so scared that he actually tells them the dream; he doesn't resort to any tricks.

Instead it's, 'I've had a dream and I'm frightened. Can you tell me what it means?'

Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar's advisers are just as useless as before and are unable to interpret the king's dream. (Why doesn't he sack them? They certainly have a zero success rate at dream interpretation!) Instead, he calls in Daniel. Daniel is greatly perplexed by the king's dream, but tells him the truth.

First, Nebuchadnezzar is about to discover that he isn't as great as he thinks he is. God is on the throne and is about to demonstrate it dramatically. In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar dreamt that he was the golden head of a dynasty that dominated the world, but the next generation would be silver, the next bronze and so on. No wonder Nebuchadnezzar thinks he is the greatest dictator for generations to come. But he is about to discover One whose dominion never ends. God is gold perpetually. He doesn't become gold and then something else. He is the king of all ages for ever. His empire won't know the gradual decay Babylon did. God's kingdom won't end in disarray: his dominion lasts for ever, and his kingdom is eternal. This was an important discovery for Nebuchadnezzar. *He* wasn't going to last for ever, nor was his *kingdom* going to last for ever: nothing lasts for ever apart from God's kingdom.

Only God is gold

In our minds we imagine that certain nations or economic and military powers are always going to be strong. In the 1930s, in the rise of the Weimar Republic, Hitler's power looked awesome and all-consuming. It seemed impossible to believe that his influence on the Nazis would not be significant for a very long time. Yet in less than fifteen years it had crumbled. Although fifteen years seems a long time to those living through a period, in the course of human history it is but an eye-blink. No superpower holds its position for ever. No nation has a God-given right to power: all are subject to God and the political situation of the world is thus in his control.

Nebuchadnezzar needed to discover this. He needed to make the journey from theory to practice. He knew in theory that he would die one day. He knew his dynasty would not always be as great as it was. He had also seen God's great delivering power when God rescued Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But already Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the greatness of God. He knew it in theory, but it was hard to know in practice. He had to come to a place where he really experienced God and could say that only God's dominion lasts for ever.

That's true for most of us. The journey of discovery is essential because it's so easy just to focus on the theory: knowing Jesus died and is risen from the dead. But do we *really* know it? God is really alive. He is really dominant. God does great miracles and answers our prayers, but the problem is that we forget. That is why we have Holy Communion, so that we never forget what God has done for us. We need this as a perpetual reminder. Some of us have forgotten how great God is. We have let our faith become mere theory and God wants it to become practice, transforming our lives.

Questions

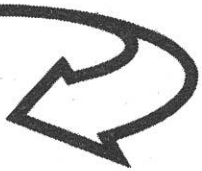
1. Briefly write your own 'testimony', describing how real God is to you.
2. Nebuchadnezzar claimed to show his repentance, not merely in extravagant speeches, but in costly actions on behalf of others. In what ways can we best demonstrate our repentance?
3. Consider the empires that have fallen in recent years (e.g. the nineteenth-century British Empire, the Nazi rule over Germany, communist USSR). Which other powers are fragile? What is God saying in all this?

Daniel 4:28–37

From humility to praise

Our pride is a gate that locks God out of our lives. Only humility can unlock that gate.

A dream fulfilled (verses 28–33)



Twelve months later Nebuchadnezzar seems to have forgotten again! In verse 4 we read that Nebuchadnezzar is contented and prosperous. The danger is that it is only one small step from there to arrogance. So we find him in verse 30 walking on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, full of pride at what his greatness has done.

Babylon was indeed an amazing place. Nebuchadnezzar's palace would have been built on the hillside, so he could look down on the hanging gardens. They were one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, a fabulous architectural and horticultural feat. Nebuchadnezzar looks down and sees this shining city teeming with life, affluence everywhere (a sort of ancient Las Vegas!). Nebuchadnezzar looks down on the splendour of everything and is filled with pride at his own accomplishments. No sooner has he spoken about his greatness when God speaks, taking his authority away from him and bringing upon him a period of madness.

The text has moved into the third person (perhaps recorded by Daniel). Nebuchadnezzar couldn't describe his madness himself. That is one of the definitions of insanity isn't it? You become unaware of who you are and are not objective about it. If you have ever seen people in a state of mental illness, one of the great sadnesses is that they don't recognize the state they are in. So they have a

detachment about the whole process. Verse 33 describes graphically what happened to Nebuchadnezzar as his madness progressed (and lasted for seven years). What did his court do during that time? Presumably, you can't just remove a dictator. So the nation just bumbled along with various people doing their best to keep things going. They probably tried to keep his insanity secret, but it must have been hard because he behaved so irrationally and wildly.

It is interesting to note that history has seen a number of insane rulers. It may be that absolute power corrupts the mind and that dictators are more subject to insanity than most. Britain's history is not empty of monarchs who were at least very odd. George III is perhaps the best known in this regard. So Nebuchadnezzar would not have been alone with this tragic seven-year period of what looks like psychiatric disorder. It may have been more profound than that: there may even have been a demonic element to it. Jesus faced instances of this. See Matthew 8:28–34.

Sanity restored (verses 34–37)

Seven years of chaos pass by until, suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses and his sanity is restored. He says that all along he has boasted about his greatness but has, at last, come to realize that the greatness belongs to God, not to himself. The great man has been greatly humbled and put in his right place before God. Nebuchadnezzar has had a massively humbling and classic experience of God, which he won't forget.

Pride is dangerous because it makes us believe we don't much need God: he becomes a sort of add-on. 'I'm pretty clever, I'm pretty content, I've arrived in life and am glad I'm a Christian because it makes my life a little better in the spiritual department.' If we have this attitude, God is out of reach. Our pride has become a barrier: a locked gate. Only through being humble, by recognizing our true place before God, will we unlock the gate. Only when we

know we have need of God, do we come and feed on him by faith in our hearts.

Digging deeper: 'One true God'? The problem of pluralism

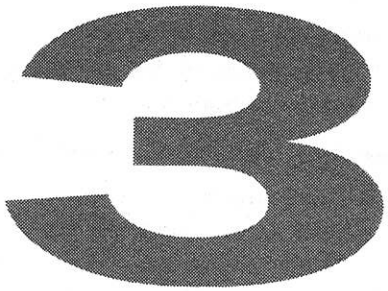
The ancient world had gods of all kinds, each competing for everyone's attention. There were gods of fertility, gods of weather, gods of war, gods of life, gods of death – the list seems endless. But the whole of the book of Daniel is about establishing one fact: there is only one God, the God Most High, Yahweh, the God of the Jews. There is only one God and he is Lord of all.

This message has a contemporary feel because pluralism rules in Western society today, too. It is just as hard for us to proclaim Jesus as the only way to God as it was for Daniel to speak about Yahweh. We are criticized for seeing Jesus as the only way. Instead, we are encouraged to be tolerant, to say that all world religions are equal. It is perfectly acceptable to witness to our faith. Few people become angry if we tell them we're Christians, but people become uncomfortable when we tell them that Christ is the only way to God. There are things in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam worth reflecting on, but the Bible is clear that there is only one God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

A danger the Western church will face increasingly in the coming years is that it will be difficult in our secular setting to proclaim that there is only one God, and that Jesus is the only way to God. Such a proclamation sounds racist. If there is anything our society won't tolerate, it's that. It *isn't* racist, but it sounds it for those who are trying to encourage relationships with those of other religions. For those who are shaping our blasphemy laws, the question is this: Is there one God or many?

Questions

1. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and came to glorify God (verse 37). What dangers might there be in humility without praise?
2. Pray together for those whom we know who suffer from psychiatric illness or depression (no need to announce people's names). Is there any other way we can help them?
3. Recent history and current events show us a number of rulers whose sanity is questionable. Why do these things happen and what can the world do about it?



THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel 5:1–31

Daniel 5:1–4

Belshazzar's orgy

Celebration is good, but there are limits to what is appropriate!

'His days are numbered.' 'Their methods have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.' 'The writing's on the wall for them.' Have you ever said any of these phrases? They all originated in chapter 5 of Daniel. Clearly, this chapter has worked its way into our consciousness over the years because Christians and non-Christians alike use these phrases. It's interesting that our culture has bought the language of the Bible in such a big way.

We now join King Belshazzar in the banqueting hall of the palace in Babylon. Many Babylonian names of the time had 'Bel' in them in deference to the god Bel (as with Daniel's new name, Belteshazzar). It is unlikely that Belshazzar is either the king or the son of Nebuchadnezzar – the word 'father' is often used in the Old Testament simply to mean 'ancestor'. Nebuchadnezzar's direct descendant, King Nabonidus, is away fighting a war and leaving Belshazzar as a kind of prince regent, the number two in the empire.

The king throws a party

Belshazzar decides to throw a banquet for thousands of his nobles, their wives and their concubines. In Old Testament times concubines weren't provided simply for sexual pleasure: they were a status symbol. Today a highly affluent person might have three or four flashy cars. In

those days people collected concubines as status symbols.

However, on this occasion, it seems that a grand orgy is taking place in the banqueting hall. It is not stated, but the hint is that it's more than just an ordinary party. There is alcohol, darkness (there would be only a few lamps) and the presence of available women. Sin flourishes in the dark, which makes it easy to do things in quiet corners unnoticed. There seems to be a lot of wine flowing – drunkenness is a characteristic of cultures in decay. (Take a look at *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon for another example.) Today 'Alcohol Awareness' tells us we are seriously abusing alcohol. This is not a plea for abstinence (there is nothing wrong with drinking alcohol if it doesn't lead to excess), but it is a reflection on our culture. More 12- to 14-year-olds are abusing alcohol than ever before. The number of people drinking alcohol to the point of being drunk (or possibly addicted) far exceeds all other drug use. In industry, millions of working days are lost every year because of alcohol. Ninety per cent of domestic abuse involves alcohol in some way. Make no mistake about it: ours is a culture in decay.

Calculated blasphemy

Drunkenness is not the only sin taking place in Belshazzar's palace: there is also blasphemy. Belshazzar has clearly not learned the lesson of his predecessor and orders that the goblets brought from the temple in Jerusalem should be used. And as they drink from them they praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone and wood. This is not the blasphemy of thoughtlessness: it is the blasphemy of downright rebellion. Sometimes we may be caught out on holiday in foreign countries when we accidentally cause offence with inappropriate dress. That is simply thoughtlessness because we've forgotten the culture and customs of the people.

Belshazzar's blasphemy is quite different: it is the blasphemy of angry intent. Effectively he's saying, 'Bring in those vessels from that God whose nation we conquered

years ago and let's show him who the real god is! It's Bel, and not Yahweh.' This is so much more than a blasphemy that uses God's name as a swear word. It's a blasphemy that shakes its fist in the face of the loving God and doesn't care. It wants to go its own way. It jokes about and dishonours the holy and pure things of God. One day we'll look at society through God's eyes and see how hateful it is to him to see such horror.

Questions

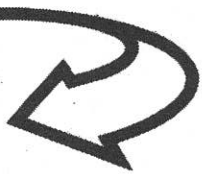
1. Where would you draw the line between thoughtlessness (in speech and behaviour) and blasphemy?
2. How far can we go to respect the religions of others when we do not accept their customs or faith, especially when we travel abroad?
3. Alcohol abuse is at the root of much that is wrong in our society today. The USA once tried Prohibition without success. What can we do locally to help, especially in the case of teenage drunkenness?

Daniel 5:5–31

God's patience runs out

Evil in high places does not always go unchecked.

The writing on the wall (verses 5–9)



As the king and his friends conducted their blasphemous orgy the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the lampstand. Notice that fas-

cinating little insight, 'the wall near the lampstand'. In the ancient world elaborate preparations had to be made to provide light by burning lamps. Consequently, in huge baronial halls it was mainly dark apart from one or two areas where lampstands were placed to break the gloom with a burning torch. The writing on the wall appears near a lampstand so it can be seen and read by everyone; otherwise, its dramatic effect will be missed. One of the wonderful things about Scripture is its attention to detail.

'The king watched the hand as it wrote' (verse 5). The words say *Mene, mene, tekel, parsin* (older translations have *uparsin* or *upharsin* or *peresh*: it is hard to establish the Aramaic). We do not know exactly what is happening here. Some suggest it is a sort of grotesque, grand illusion, but a thousand people in the same place don't hallucinate the same thing. In some miraculous way God intervenes here and the king's response is dramatic. The Hebrew implies that the blood drained from his face, so he became ashen with terror: he went into a kind of faint.

The king calls out for all the diviners to be brought to interpret the message (verse 7), and promises that whoever can do it will be promoted to third most important person in the kingdom. (He couldn't make him the number two in the kingdom because he himself was the number two.) Once again the diviners are useless! They haven't once come up with the goods! One of the themes of Daniel is the huge dismissal of occult and human wisdom: it just doesn't work. It is powerless in the face of God.

The queen mother to the rescue (verses 10–16)

The queen is not Belshazzar's wife. It is more likely that she is Nebuchadnezzar's wife, an elderly matriarchal figure who is still honoured and loved around the palace area. She would have seen the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar and how he turned to the Lord, and she had no time for Belshazzar. (Scripture has no time for him either!) She tells Belshazzar to call for Daniel, about whom she gives a stunning commendation (verses 11–12).

Daniel's history lesson (verses 17–28)

So Daniel, probably an old man in his eighties by this stage, enters the room, perhaps with difficulty, but certainly with enormous dignity. What a figure he cuts compared with everybody else. They are semi-drunk, immoral, in the gluttonous excesses of an orgy, whereas he stands, different, clear, honest, God's man. It is a stirring image.

Belshazzar tells Daniel what has happened, asks for his help and promises a reward. As soon as Daniel responds we can see that he is another who doesn't have much time for Belshazzar. Daniel reminds Belshazzar of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he became proud and overbearing. Has no lesson from recent history been learned? Daniel is blunt: 'You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else' (verse 17). It's the Hebrew equivalent of 'On your bike!' He was gracious to Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 4) and spoke to him with honour and dignity, but is unimpressed by Belshazzar. Telling him he can keep his gifts is not the way you speak to a crown prince, unless you are certain of your ground. Daniel *is* certain, because he comes with God's authority to tell Belshazzar the meaning of the words: 'God says your days are numbered. You have been weighed and found wanting, Belshazzar. You are flouting God's authority. You think you can mock him, but God is in control. You have messed with the living God one time too many and tonight your soul will be required of you.'

God in control (verses 29–31)

That very night, in the year 539 BC, Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over as king at the age of 62. Nabonidus was deposed on his return to his capital. Once again, as we saw in chapter 2, the book of Daniel tells us perhaps above everything else that God is the Lord of the universe and this is his planet. Although the future may be frightening, ultimately God is in control.

Questions

1. Make a list of those who need to see 'writing on the wall' today (include yourself, if appropriate). Then pray for them slowly and deliberately.
2. As a group, act out a role play. One represents someone in high office (e.g. a royal or an archbishop); another depicts a blunt and critical person, who speaks his mind openly; another is a mild, deferential person. Then discuss how we ought to respect those in authority appropriately.
3. Think of rulers who act like Belshazzar today. Why do you think God does not deal with them as he did with Belshazzar?

Important doctrine: Standing for what is right

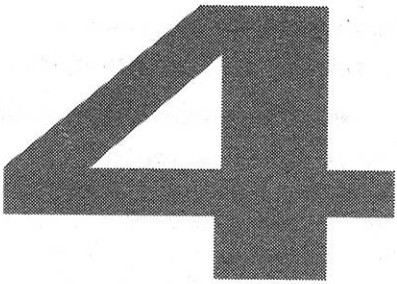
In a scene of complete devastation, drunkenness and fear Daniel is not afraid to be different. He stands out as God's man and his story encourages us to do the same. That's the challenge to us: to stand out for God, to be a Daniel (or a Danielle – let's not be sexist!) when you're at work or at home. It's hard work standing out: most of us would rather melt into the background. We need the anointing power of the Holy Spirit living inside us to help us stand out. The thrilling thing is that Daniel doesn't get into the background; he stands up and tells it like it is. He is God's person and interprets God's message and speaks it into his situation.

The writing's on the wall unless we live for him and sow the seeds of revival wherever we are. Perhaps you could bring a word of encouragement, a word of blessing or a word of challenge. Bring it as God's child whoever and wherever you are: the world won't be changed until every person is a Daniel in his or her place of work.

Don't be tempted to assume that one person can have very little influence and can't change the world; don't

believe it. Recently some news emerged for the first time about the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. America and the Soviet Union were close to a nuclear engagement. A Soviet nuclear submarine was stationed in the Cuban area (unknown to American intelligence). The crisis was getting to such a point that there was discussion on board the Soviet submarine about firing a nuclear weapon. In the Russian nuclear navy three officers had to give permission before a warhead could be fired: the captain, his number two and a nuclear officer. Things got so bad that the captain decided to fire and his number two agreed. They met with the nuclear officer, a Russian sailor of relatively junior rank, and asked him to agree before they pressed the button. He refused. Despite personal bullying, he would not agree and therefore they didn't have the authority to fire, and the moment passed. That Russian sailor saved that part of the hemisphere from a frightening nuclear strike (imagine what would have happened if it had been launched!). One man, a junior naval ranking officer, stood firm and said what he thought was right.

So when you're in your office or your home or your street, there may be the chance to say a little something, or breathe a prayer, or do an action that marks you out as a child of God. Do it, in the power of the Spirit. It may have more effect than you could possibly imagine, but leave the results to God. God is in charge of our world and we are his ambassadors.



DANIEL, DARIUS AND A DEN OF LIONS

Daniel 6

Daniel 6:1–9

The perils of power

Success always provokes jealousy.

This is, of course, the most famous chapter in the book of Daniel, the story of how he was fed to the lions. Often we think of it as a children's Sunday school story, but actually it is an adult story of brutal political intrigue. It rivals any amount of backstabbing that Parliament can provide; it would make a fabulous film (possibly with an 18 certificate, given the level of violence!). It looks at history and politics, and at what motivates people. It reminds us that behind even the most significant global leaders lies human frailty.

Daniel, a target for jealousy

The administrators and satraps (provincial governors) tried to find fault with Daniel, but were unable to (verse 4). They could find no corruption in him. They realized that they were never going to find a basis for any charges unless it was something to do with the law of Daniel's God. Religious persecution was their only option. So they appealed to the king. The king signed a special legal edict that even he could not repeal. (Even if he could have found a way out, it would have destroyed his credibility to do a U-turn.) There was no court of appeal: it was this or nothing else. The law of the Medes and Persians was a specific legal instrument that allowed for absolute, unrivalled certainty, which was important in a lawless world. It was a law given a time limit (on this occasion limited to a month), when it would be absolute.

King Darius agreed to put the decree in writing.

Why was Daniel so despised? One reason was racism. He was not 'one of them', but a foreigner from Judah, and the other administrators did not want him ruling over them. They were jockeying for power and hated the thought of Daniel, the foreigner, being promoted above them.

But they were also jealous. So jealous, in fact, that, finding no corruption in him, they tried to discover skeletons in his cupboard. It was the equivalent of bringing in the gutter press to try to dig up some dirt on Daniel. Next time you see a front-page revelation about a celebrity, spare a thought for them. Britain's gutter press is world-famous for its tactics of uncovering people's weaknesses, and probably no-one is without a skeleton somewhere in a cupboard.

Jealousy in the church

However, the other administrators couldn't find fault with Daniel, and so they became even more jealous. How easy it is for us to become jealous. We see other people and we want what they have. We become jealous of people who have better health than we have or a happier family than ours. Maybe they are more successful than we are, or have achieved promotion even though we both started work at the same time. It is easy to be jealous of those who have things we don't have, even in the church. 'How come they've been asked to be a house-group leader when they've only been coming to church for a couple of years?' 'Why has nobody in this church recognized my gifts?' 'How come their children are all faithful Christians, and ours have gone off the rails?'

There are so many reasons to look at one another with jealousy in our eyes, and, if we are not careful, jealousy turns to hatred. That is what happened to Daniel: he was despised for nothing other than being good at his job.

Jealousy is rampant in our world; it is part of the human condition and we have to kill it. At its best it is not a nice

attitude and it doesn't speak well of us. At its worst it destroys us and the people we are jealous of. Pray that God will deliver us from jealousy and help us to follow him purely, openly and transparently. Ask God to give us the attitude that rejoices when others succeed. That is real maturity.

Questions

1. Make a short list of the people of whom you are tempted to be jealous. Ask yourself why this might be. In what ways, if at all, does this help you not to be jealous?
2. How can we make it possible to avoid jealousy in church fellowship?
3. Ambition for power often involves jealousy for the posts of others in government, church and society. What can turn this jealousy into a desire to use one's gifts in service to others?

Digging deeper: Daniel's place in the new hierarchy

The Babylonian Empire had collapsed in a welter of decay, failure and internal rebellion, and Darius the Mede had become king in 539 BC. He was the first Medo-Persian emperor, in charge of a massive empire – the largest empire the world had seen up to this point.

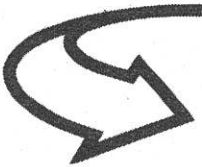
Darius appointed 120 satraps, a word hardly ever used in the Bible, to rule throughout the kingdom. A satrap was a kind of regional administrator and there were three administrators above them. (This seems to be the first example in the Bible of the establishment of the civil service.) The satraps were made accountable to the administrators, one of whom was Daniel, who was probably quite elderly at this stage. They were in charge of collecting and

administering taxes, and ensuring the king wasn't being ripped off. Daniel so distinguished himself that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. This is where the problem began.

Daniel 6:10–18

Daniel's unswerving loyalty to God

The habit of daily prayer makes prayer in a crisis more effectual.



Daniel remains faithful to God (verses 10–11)

When Daniel heard about the decree, he went home and continued praying as before, beside an upstairs window that faced Jerusalem. This would have been a little slatted window, facing slightly upwards, allowing ventilation in, but not much heat. You can't see in through these windows from the outside, so the only way the other men could see Daniel praying was by deliberately snooping. They had probably got themselves into an unusual position to enable them to do it (possibly the flat roof of the next-door house).

Daniel looked out towards Jerusalem as he prayed because that was the centre of worship for the one true God. *This* was the God who was going to rule and reign, not the gods of Babylon. Daniel was defiant because he had different kingdom values. Although he was in Babylon, he was still a citizen of God's kingdom. So he continued to pray to God three times a day as he had always done before. And because Daniel prayed three times a day in the good times, it was no problem at all for

him to pray three times a day in the bad. If you develop the habit of spirituality when it is easy, it will stand you in good stead when the going is hard. The problem is that most of our prayer lives are crisis driven. When we are in a crisis, we pray: 'Dear God, help me. I am worried about my exams. I am worried about these test results. I am worried about my job. I am sick, please heal me ...'

We pray in a crisis and God seems a long way away. Yet it is much easier to feel God in a crisis if we have talked to him when we are not in a crisis. It's important to build the habit of talking to God frequently, even three times a day like Daniel did.

Darius imprisoned by his own laws (verses 12–15)

When the administrators and satraps reported this to King Darius, he realized they had taken him in. He had been deceived because of a fatal flaw in his personality. The jealous administrators had appealed to his pride by using flattery, and they succeeded because pride is even more dangerous than jealousy. People have stood up to antagonism and persecution, but have been undone by flattery. After all, if you had to choose between criticism and flattery, which would you choose? I reckon flattery wins every time because it's so much easier to deal with. Actually, flattery is deeply manipulative, so beware if you are in any form of leadership. Which young person hasn't tried flattery to manipulate his parents? Or how many husbands have paid their wife a compliment only to receive the reply 'What do you want?'

We are not above manipulation, and we see it here on a grand scale because Darius is proud. The administrators suggested that the people should worship him (verse 7) and Darius agreed. You can see the appeal: not only could he be the ruler of the greatest empire, but he could be a god as well.

But Darius realizes his error when he knows Daniel must die, and the king is greatly distressed (verse 14), making every effort to rescue Daniel. He probably con-

sulted all the best lawyers in the land to try to find a loophole. Surely he could undo the law he had made? But the law stood: Darius could not escape it and Daniel was brought to the pit of lions.

Daniel's dungeon sealed (verses 16–18)

The dungeon was a pit in the ground and the lions of the mountain variety, smaller than African lions. Nevertheless, the punishment was easy to administer because the lions would have been kept deliberately hungry and the criminals would be thrown in and the pit sealed up. There was no escape.

As Daniel was sentenced to the pit of lions, Darius said, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you' (verse 16). He had recognized Daniel's faithfulness by his consistency. Genuine spirituality is expressed in consistency. Serving God isn't something that happens once: 'I served God today.' It's the consistency of serving him week in, week out, month in, month out, year in, year out – all the days of our lives. The challenge to us is not *just* to serve God, but to serve him continually. The people who are successful as Christian believers are those who go on faithfully serving until the day they die. That's how they know daily deliverance.

So Daniel was thrown into the pit and the king sealed it to make sure no-one tried to rescue him. Then Darius returned to his palace and spent the night without eating or enjoying any entertainment (verse 18). We're not sure exactly what that would involve, possibly a jester, musicians or a range of concubines for sexual pleasure. Whatever it was, Darius refused it because he was so concerned about Daniel. He was so worried, he couldn't even sleep. And no wonder, his conscience was bothering him badly, even as a dictator king. He had condemned an innocent man to death and he knew it.

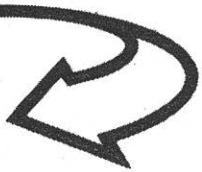
Questions

1. Do you have a pattern of regular prayer, or do you just pray when you feel like it? Or both? What are the values and problems involved in having a regular prayer time?
2. What value is there in prayer meetings and congregational prayers? Compare extempore prayer and set, written prayers. What are their respective merits?
3. How can a legal system allow for exceptions to its rules where compassion is needed? Think of some examples. For instance, should euthanasia be banned absolutely? What about abortion?

Daniel 6:19–28

Daniel delivered

God overrules savage laws and savage beasts.



At first light Darius got up and went to the lions' den. When he arrived, he called out to Daniel, 'Has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?' (verse 20).

Then come the two most important words in the chapter, 'Daniel answered' (verse 21). If Daniel *had* been eaten by the lions, there would have been silence, but instead Daniel answers. He is alive! Daniel calls out to Darius that God's angels have closed the mouths of the lions, which have not harmed him. He continues, 'I was found innocent in his [God's] sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king' (verse 22). (One didn't normally say

such things to ancient kings, but Darius had behaved foolishly and needed to be reminded.)

The king was overjoyed to hear Daniel, and gave orders for him to be lifted from the pit. Not a single wound was found on Daniel, because he had trusted God. Then, at the king's command, those who had falsely accused Daniel were thrown into the pit along with their families, and were killed immediately by the lions (verse 24). This is a horrific punishment, and yet the Bible passes no comment upon it. It seems barbaric to us that these men were punished in this way along with their innocent wives and children, but it reflects this bloody and cruel phase of human history. It also reflects an element of old Middle Eastern culture, where the whole family is viewed together. If one member of the family behaves brutally, the whole family is tainted by the guilt and is likely to be slaughtered when that member is caught. We find it distasteful that this kind of horror is perpetrated on what we perceive to be innocent people, but the Bible passes no comment on the rights and wrongs of it.

God's miraculous intervention

There seems to be a constant stream of critics (in theological college and out of it) who try to debunk or demythologize the miracles in the Bible. Perhaps Jesus didn't really feed five thousand people: it's just that people were moved to share their food when they saw a small boy being generous. Or Jesus didn't really die: he just fainted and his friends rescued him. Or maybe Daniel slipped a club or a knife under his shirt, so he could fight off the lions! Or perhaps the lions had just had supper, so they weren't hungry. Some people find miracles hard to cope with, so the writer is at pains to point out that the lions devoured all the other people. They *had* been hungry when Daniel was in the pit. A miracle *did* take place. God *did* rescue Daniel. Miracles are entirely in keeping with God's nature: mysterious and beyond our understanding.

God's ultimate solution

When we find ourselves in the lions' den, some of us will be miraculously delivered, but some won't. Yet the day is coming when we're all going to find ourselves in resurrection glory, complete and whole and with God for ever. The Bible constantly points to the victory God brings in resurrection power. Even Darius, the pagan king, utters an amazing testimony when he acknowledges that Daniel's God is a God who rescues and saves (verse 27). That is what God does: he performs signs and wonders; he rescues; he saves. He is in the rescue business. He wants to rescue us and we need rescuing. God rescues us from our sin, self-centredness and from messing up our lives. Ultimately, Jesus' death and resurrection rescues us from eternal separation from God.

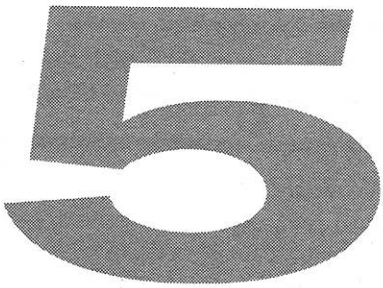
So impressed is Darius by the God who rescued Daniel that he issues another decree that everyone should worship this living, powerful, rescuing God, whose dominion will never end.

Questions

1. Make a list of times when God has rescued you from a 'den of lions' (or situations less horrifying). Give thanks.
2. Many people say that they find miracles impossible to believe in. Why is this? Do miracles stop happening when people can't accept them? Think of some examples.
3. Why do governments resort to cruel repression? Is the American dream of worldwide peaceful democracy possible of fulfilment? What methods do Western democracies use to retain control? Do you think they are in line with God's will?

Important doctrine: Daniel foreshadows Jesus

Hebrews 11 tells us that many people *were* martyred for their faith. In the first century AD people were thrown to the lions and didn't survive; but God sometimes does work a miracle, and he did here. And there is a hint here of something rather more fantastic. Who else was falsely accused, was unjustly convicted, was sent to his death innocently, was in a dark place with a stone rolled over the entrance – and then was miraculously alive? This story hints at another resurrection to come. Daniel didn't die on this occasion, but Jesus really died and he really became alive from the dead. Some of us will be delivered from lions' dens, some of us will have to go through awful anguish here on earth, but the day is coming when those of us not left alive to be caught up at Jesus' second coming will have gone into the jaws of death itself. But Jesus encountered the roaring lion, Satan, seeking whom he could devour. Satan's jaws clamped round Jesus on that first Good Friday and tried to ravage him to death, but Jesus conquered death and defeated Satan.



DANIEL'S TERRIFYING VISIONS

Daniel 7 and 8

Daniel 7

The rule of the Ancient of Days

Coming face to face with the reality of God and his cosmic purposes can be a mind-blowing experience.

We've had lions and dens, writing on the wall and statues to bow to, but now we come to chapters 7 and 8, which are hard to understand. These chapters are full of stunning, dramatic visual pictures. Cast your eyes through them and you'll see lions with wings like eagles, animals with ten horns, beasts with four heads and iron teeth and so on. This is a very difficult section of Scripture, but because it's in the Bible it needs to be taken seriously. This part of Daniel is a type of literature called apocalyptic literature. (The Greek word literally means 'an unveiling'.) It's like Ezekiel or Revelation, where an idea is wrapped in vivid, unforgettable word pictures. Animals or other dramatic objects seem to represent earthly kingdoms of one form or another. In the ancient world animals were associated with nations. It happens today when cartoonists represent countries by different sorts of animals. There's a British lion or an American eagle or a Russian bear; these are common images, familiar to us. Apocalyptic literature is full of imagery, and out of that imagery the Bible tries to teach us something about the present and the future.

God supreme over all history (verses 1–18)

Chapter 7 begins in the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. Clearly, we are out of order here because chapter 6 ended in the reign of Darius. After chapter 6 the book is

a series of prophetic visions and so is no longer in historical order.

There seems to be a correlation between chapters 2 and 7 – the visions have some parallels. The gold head of the statue in chapter 2 and the lion in chapter 7 are thought to refer to the kingdom of Babylon. Then the silver in chapter 2 and the bear in 7 refer to the lords of the Medes and Persians. Then the bronze is a parallel with the leopard, which refers to the Greek Empire. The iron and the beast with horns refer to the empire at the time of Jesus. Then there is reference to Rome and, ultimately, God's kingdom. The image of chapter 2 is of a supernatural boulder coming and smashing the statue, and in chapter 7 it is the Ancient of Days (sometimes called the Son of Man) coming to dominate the world scene.

This is really what the whole book is about. It is not about Daniel, but Daniel's God. It is a revelation to us, a drawing back of the curtains and the unveiling of a God who loves us and who is in charge of planet earth. In 7:9 we see thrones set in place, a vision of God. In 7:26 a court is sitting and handing over the sovereignty of the kingdoms to the saints, the people of God. In 7:27 we read of God's kingdom being an everlasting kingdom, where all rulers will worship and obey him. Whatever the detail of this vision means, the main theme is that God is in charge. The world and its kingdoms are God's responsibility. When we look at our world with all its problems, there is a tendency to believe that the world is being taken over and we can do nothing about it. It seems as if everything has gone mad and we have no recourse to a higher power. But God *is* in charge. Daniel had a fantastic, colourful vision of generation after generation and empire after empire breaking down, but in the end God would be in charge.

The Ancient of Days' rule is everlasting (verses 19–28)

The Ancient of Days appears in 7:10–14 and again in verse 22, and is a lovely phrase that defines the kind of

God we have. The Ancient of Days is sometimes understood to mean Jesus himself. Funnily enough, the phrase literally means 'elderly', but more importantly it has the view of one who is so wise that he is before everyone else. In our culture we tend to dismiss old age and see it as a negative concept: 'Oh, he wouldn't understand: he's ancient.'

But the Jews honoured age and had great respect for the elderly. In the wisdom of the ancients old people were seen as incredibly wise, and old civilizations were venerated. Today the culture of the Far East respects old age.

Here God is called the Ancient of Days – one so wise he knows everything. Realizing God is like this is a tremendous comfort. So much about our lives is confusing. People we have prayed for don't get better; jobs don't work out; homes are unhappy ... Somehow, nothing seems to work and we come to a God who is called the Ancient of Days. He understands everything because he is ancient. So come to God with all your doubts and ignorance. Even if you think life stinks and is a mess and you don't know where it's going. Come in prayer to a God who is the Ancient of Days. He is a repository of all wisdom. Nothing fools him. Nothing globally or personally catches him off guard or takes him by surprise. This is our wise God.

Questions

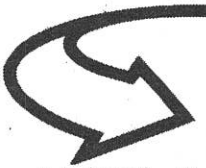
1. Recall any awe-inspiring moments when you felt God close to you, when the 'curtain was drawn back' a little. What difference has this made to your life? If you can't think of any such experience, don't worry: we aren't all Daniels.
2. What is the significance of the title 'Ancient of Days'? Does it refer to Wisdom? To God? To Jesus Christ? How can it help us in our worship?
3. How many animals can you think of that symbolize nations? Are they really applicable? If all races were

merged into one, what animal might symbolize it? Do you think God wants this to happen? Why?/Why not?

Daniel 8

The sanity of God in a world gone mad

Visions may be too powerful for us, but they call us to be humble before God. The all-powerful God will be judge of all.



Daniel was much troubled by the visions he saw: 'I ... was troubled in spirit' (7:15); 'I ... was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale' (7:28); 'I ... was exhausted and lay ill for several days' (8:27).

Daniel didn't understand the visions given to him in any detail, so it is hardly likely that we will understand them when we read them thousands of years later, in a different language and with the perspective of a different culture. The human mind has massive limitations; we will never understand everything or be able to explain everything. (That's quite a relief!) We won't be able to understand all that occurs in our lives. We ask why we have to suffer and why some of our prayers don't seem to be answered. There are limits to our understanding, but we worship a God who is beyond human understanding.

Perplexed? Join the human race!

Daniel is perplexed by all he knows, and some of us are in the state of being perplexed. If you are, then you are in very good company, because most thoughtful Christians are perplexed. If you are not at all perplexed and you

think everything in our world is crystal clear, if you have already decided you know everything, then you should be concerned, because these chapters point to human limitation. We see Daniel's fear, sadness and confusion, but it is matched by the Ancient of Days operating in divine power. Faced with these visions Daniel's only hope is to abandon human ingenuity and throw himself on the mercy of God. That is a great state for us to be in, too. Maybe you've prayed for someone for a long time and haven't seen any change in that person, and you don't understand why. Instead of trying to reason it out, try throwing yourself on God's wisdom. That doesn't mean we jettison our brains (we have to go on thinking carefully about things), but only God is all-powerful.

The books are opened

The image of divine power is seen clearly in chapter 7, verses 10 and 26, as we see a river of fire flowing out from God and thousands upon thousands attending him. There are echoes of Revelation here. Notice the legal imagery as the court is seated, the books are opened and the power of the beast is taken away. The picture is of a wise judge, the Ancient of Days, presiding over a court at the end of the age, and all the books of human history are open in this court. My life and yours are laid bare before God. Every nation will be laid bare before God. The Ancient of Days, who has been around from before the beginning, scans the books and weighs the planet in the balance.

He knows. Every detail of our lives will be known, both the good things and the bad things, and we, as Christians, will be welcomed into the arms of a loving father who sits as judge over all. These chapters remind us that the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome – all nations – will be judged by God. God will open the books and make the final decision. Every human being, the clever and not so clever, the spiritual and not so spiritual, all of us will stand one day before the Ancient of Days who opens the books and reads about our lives there. And

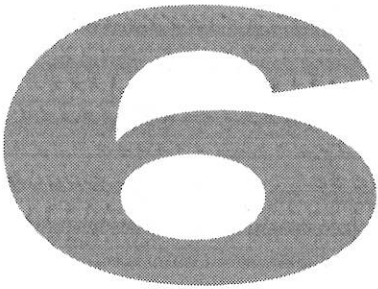
those who have the name 'Jesus' stamped over their lives will enter into the glory of the Ancient of Days, where they will join in eternal worship.

That is the promise of this prophetic literature, and it's exciting. Amid all the colours and the impossible-to-understand, Daniel comes to the limit of his humanity and throws himself on God. He says, 'God, I can't understand all this without you. I can't live without you, and I need you.'

We have to live for God in homes and workplaces we may find confusing and pressurized. We live in a world we don't understand – it seems to have gone mad. The message of Daniel is that we won't find meaning in slick interpretations, but only as we immerse ourselves in Daniel's God, knowing his love and power in our lives.

Questions

1. What is your response to world news? Ignore it? Worry about it? Pray about it? How far can you see a purpose in it all?
2. If we are not meant fully to understand apocalyptic literature, why is it part of Scripture?
3. Where is God at work in international relations? Give examples. Give thanks.



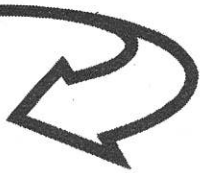
DANIEL'S PRAYER

Daniel 9

Daniel 9:1–19

Daniel repents on behalf of his people

Daniel's great prayer for deliverance.



We can set Daniel's prayer in its place in history as we know that Darius was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom between 550 to 500 years before Jesus.

Daniel has read a prophecy from Jeremiah suggesting when the children of Israel would be taken away into captivity. It is a specific prophecy – the prophecy would be for a seventy-year period – and Daniel lives in the light of this. We now have a pretty clear idea of when the seventy years began – either 597 or 587 BC – but Daniel was not so sure.

Daniel uses Scripture to inform his prayers (verses 1–2)

What Daniel *is* sure about is the authenticity of Jeremiah's words. Daniel takes these Scriptures very seriously and they inform his praying. He doesn't just pray in a vacuum – he prays on the basis of the certainty of what the Scripture has told. Daniel prays in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy and is strengthened by its message. Out of his knowledge of God's word Daniel prays with vigour and energy because he believes the Bible to be true.

Daniel was soaked in the Scripture of his day and it is a challenge to us to be the same. Our prayers can be based on the irreducible core fact of God's revelation. If our knowledge of the Holy Book is superficial or limited, we have no way to rest on the weight of its promises and no way to gain strength from its teaching. But if we, like

Daniel, are soaked in Scripture, we can pray from its revelation and its truth. When we believe the Bible to be true, it shapes our lives in many different ways.

Daniel's passion (verse 3)

Out of Daniel's knowledge of Scripture comes great passion. He would have prayed every day (see Daniel 6:10–11). After many years he would be praying, 'Lord, is it now? Is it now we are going to be delivered? Is it now we are going to be set free? We want to go home to the place you have called us to be.'

Notice Daniel's intensity – he pleads with God in prayer and petition. The word 'petition' here literally means 'the repeated asking for something in fasting'. Daniel was so serious about his people's deliverance that he was willing to go without food and to put on sackcloth and ashes (the classic Jewish expression). He was going to do everything possible to send God a signal that he was passionate about the deliverance of his people.

Passion based on Scripture leads to prayer for God to act. If our prayer amounts to 'Oh, by the way, Lord, bless so-and-so,' it doesn't sound as if we are too involved. God may answer that off-hand prayer, but not because of our commitment.

Daniel's confession (verses 4–11)

Confession is the motive running through Daniel's prayer, but it also has elements of judgment and elements of being set free.

Out of his passionate prayer came Daniel's confession. He is a man of great humility and he confesses corporate sins on behalf of his people. In starting his prayer with confession Daniel puts himself and God in the right order. Although God is perfect, Daniel is not. Although God is righteous, Daniel is not. As Daniel looks upon God's greatness he acknowledges his need for help and his confession comes from the heart: 'God, please forgive.' One of

the great ways to start prayer is with confession. We can begin with rejoicing that at the cross our sin has been dealt with and that we are reconciled – God is on our side. But we need also 'to keep short accounts' with God – to say sorry for our wrongdoings and be refreshed by his forgiveness.

Accepting judgment (verses 11–14)

After confession we are rightfully judged, but we move on from that judgment to the call to be set free. It has been said that to be justified means just-as-if-I'd never sinned. But we all did and our sins were real, so real that they drove Jesus, God's son, to the cross. And that cross was real, so real that we are now able to be free from the guilt and move on in the light of our new relationship with God in Christ.

Daniel calls for deliverance (verses 15–19)

Now the passion and prayer come together. Daniel prays, 'We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy' (verse 18). That is the secret: to pray, 'God, we are not asking you for this because we have got it right. We are asking this because you are right and we are wrong.'

This is a great help when we are praying for the community, or praying for a sick relative, or praying for a situation that worries us desperately: 'God, we are sorry. We are rightly under judgment as a nation and we are rightly under judgment as individuals. Please set us free. Set us free now, not because we deserve it, but because you are righteous. Set us free.'

And as Daniel prays he asks that God might make this to be the moment of fulfilment of the prophecy.

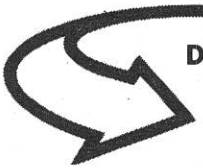
Questions

1. 'Lord, I have sinned.' When you say these words, what depth of meaning do they have for you? A great sense of guilt, merely a form of words or what?
2. How can we help one another to be more fervent and passionate in our praying? What may be our equivalent of sackcloth and fasting?
3. How can a group, like a prayer fellowship, hope to make an impression on the sins of the whole world?

Daniel 9:20–27

God answers Daniel's prayer with a riddle

Prayer may be answered at once but not always in ways we can understand.



Daniel calls for deliverance (verses 20–22)

Daniel reaches the end of his prayer at the end of verse 19 with a great cry of urgency for God to act. Daniel wants a transformational response to his prayer. He cries to God for deliverance, and God shows up! And this is the message of both the Old and New Testaments (a repeated theme throughout the Scriptures): that God is the great deliverer. He sets free.

Before Daniel finished praying, the answer came – from Gabriel, in a vision. Gabriel, the man Daniel had seen in an earlier vision, comes to him. We know Gabriel to be an angel, a messenger from God, who comes to bring Daniel insight and understanding.

God answers Daniel's prayer (verse 23)

Notice how Daniel didn't know what the answer to his prayer would be; but as soon as he prayed, the answer was given. This is often true for us: we pray for something for ages and it could well be that as we started to pray, the answer was given; but we haven't received it yet. Sometimes we don't receive the answer to our prayer immediately (it takes time for God's purposes to be worked out), and sometimes we don't recognize it when it comes (see below, 'Important doctrine: Answers to prayer').

Seventy sevens are promised (verses 24–25)

Questions about whether this prophecy refers to the first or second coming of Jesus have perplexed scholars for many years. Certainly seventy times seven could refer to years (though the seven can mean seven days; i.e. a week – see below), which comes to 490 years, which points to the death and resurrection of Jesus in the first century AD. We do not know for certain that it is a literal 490 years. The seventy years in verse 3 is a literal seventy years, and so it seems appropriate that the whole theme is in a literal context. What is important is that Gabriel tells Daniel that deliverance is certain; though it is not receivable now.

In fact, the seventy years prophecy was fulfilled at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and then through Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The people were returned to the land. Jerusalem was restored. There was great hope there.

The Anointed One will come (verses 26–27)

The Anointed One is a reference to Jesus. He came into the world and was rejected, hurt, abandoned, ultimately crucified. However this prophecy is to be fulfilled, Jesus is also coming back as the Anointed One to wrap up human history to make sure that the final moment is the deliverance by God as he promised. This prophecy reminds us

that troubles come through every period of history, but deliverance is certain. Although the answer is delayed, and the delay seems intolerable, the answer is coming. We are in a world of torture and sin, and Satan dominates the cultural horizon. We are a world in pain (both corporate and personal) and await our deliverance. The prophecy of Daniel points to a first coming, which we celebrate at Christmas, as the start of this fabulous deliverance for the human race. And it points beyond that to a second coming, when the deliverance will be completed. The wait may be agony, but the outcome is certain. God is going to answer our prayers: he is going to set us free.

Questions

1. Look back for, say, a month and note down some of the things you have asked God for. How many requests have been answered? At once? After a delay? Not yet? How do you decide whether a prayer has been answered or not?
2. 'God is the great deliverer. He sets free.' What do we, individually or together, need to be freed from? Has God already given us freedom? In what ways?
3. How do we view the prospect of the second coming of Christ? How will it affect us, our friends, our families, our church? And the way we live now?
4. We are told that every eye will see him (Revelation 1:7) and every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10) at the second coming. How could this be in practice?

Important doctrine: Are we responsible for the sins of others?

'All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you,' says Daniel in his prayer (verse 11). In an even more dramatic gesture Moses denounced the sin of the people who had made and worshipped the gold-

en calf, and offered to 'go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin' (Exodus 32:30). He even offered himself up as a sacrifice: 'please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written' (verse 32). God's reply makes it clear that this can't be: 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book' (verse 33). So we are not responsible for the sins of others, but each person is responsible to God for his or her own life.

We may, however, feel guilty on behalf of our ancestors. Japanese people may feel guilty for their grandfathers' treatment of prisoners of war. British people may feel the need to confess to the indiscriminate bombing of German cities during the Second World War. It can't be wrong for us to share these feelings with God and to ask him to forgive, even though the events happened before we were born. Perhaps there is such a thing as 'collective guilt', in that we are all involved in the sins of the whole of humanity.

What about other individuals? If people will not repent of their own sins, can we confess them on their behalf? We can certainly ask God to forgive them, but it must be for them to repent. There is a danger, too, in confessing other people's sins: we may tend to ignore our own and judge those of others – something Jesus expressly forbade us to do (Matthew 7:1).

Our own wrongdoings are burden enough: we can't shoulder the guilt of others. Only Jesus himself was able to take upon himself the sins of the whole world.

Digging deeper: Sackcloth and ashes

Sackcloth was coarse, black cloth usually made from goats' hair. It was worn at times of mourning, during natural disasters, or as a symbol of repentance. Daniel wore it (9:3) when he was praying special prayers for deliverance.

Some of the prophets would wear it as a symbol of repentance when they preached.

It was usually worn around the waist next to the skin like a belt and was sometimes kept on all night. At other times people would lay it out on the ground and lie on it as they prayed. The book of Jonah tells us that the king of Nineveh once wore it like a cloak around his shoulders (Jonah 3:6). Even animals were dressed in it as a sign of national supplication (Jonah 3:8)!

Poor people, such as shepherds, wore sackcloth every day because it was cheap and hard-wearing. It would therefore be associated with poverty and the 'lowest of the low', which is probably why it became appropriate material for wearing during a time of penitence.

On occasions, people wearing sackcloth would also daub themselves in ashes. There was an ancient military practice of burning enemy cities, which therefore associated ashes with death. This would make them appropriate symbols of mourning. Death is also a sign of our mortality, so ashes would represent our penitence, acknowledging our weak humanity before an Almighty God.

Digging deeper: The 'seventy sevens'

Some numbers in the Bible have symbolic or theological significance and of all of them seven is the most important. Seven is used to signify totality or completeness. For example, because God completed his work of creation in seven days, seven symbolizes a complete cycle of time and, in Leviticus, the sprinkling of sacrificial blood seven times indicates complete purification (Leviticus 16:14).

Because God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh, sometimes the seventh in a series of seven is different from the other six and brings things to a climax (e.g. the seventh sign in John's Gospel is that of death and resurrection).

The number seventy is connected with God's administration of the world. For example, the people of Judah spent seventy years in exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11) and Jesus called for us to forgive each other seventy times seven times (Matthew 18:22). In Daniel 9, sixty-nine sevens spans the time during which God will bring about redemption, culminating in the arrival of the Anointed One. This causes problems if you take the time frame literally, but possibly the first set of sevens refers to the completion of the temple, and the final seven could indicate that Christ confirms God's covenant for all ages to come.

Important doctrine: The second coming

The term 'second coming' is never used in the Bible; rather, it refers to the return of Christ at, or near, the end of human history. Jesus talks about his return as being unexpected, like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43). No-one except God knows when Jesus will return, and so he instructs his followers to be alert and ready (Matthew 24:36, 42). Jesus describes in dramatic terms what will happen before his return; for instance, there will be wars, nations will rise against each other, the sun will be darkened and the Son will appear on the clouds in great power and glory (Matthew 24).

Paul echoes his Lord's words, adding the facts that Jesus will come with a loud shout, a trumpet blast and the voice of the archangel. Christ's return heralds the resurrection of all who believe and trust in him. It's a time of great joy, because it means we will be with the Lord for ever (1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11).

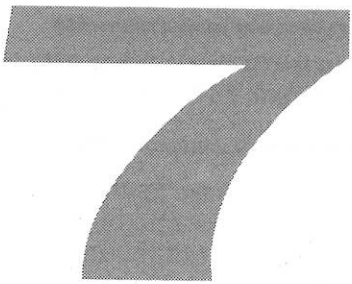
Important doctrine: Answers to prayer

As soon as Daniel prayed, the answer was given. This is often true for us. Often, but not always. It has been said that there are three answers to prayer: 'Yes,' 'No' and

'Wait'. Fred Crix, in his excellent little book *God's Five Answers to Prayer* (Crossway, 1999), suggests two more: 'Do it yourself' and 'Mind your own business.' The point, of course, is that God is not a slot machine. We can't put petitions in and expect a printout of exactly what we wanted. What would the world be like if everyone could get every wish granted?! No. God is personal. He reacts to our prayers for our own good, for other people's good and for his own, perhaps secret, purposes.

Jesus famously said, 'the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name' (John 15:16). The clue here is 'in my name'. The phrase implies, 'in accordance with my plan', 'for my sake'. An important aspect of prayer is finding out what God wants and then co-operating with him in the doing of it. Finding out might be easy, or it might take years of agonizing prayer.

We should be assured that God is on our side. We are not in the business of wresting what we want from a grudging God, but helping him to release his blessings in the best ways possible.



GOD IN CHARGE OF HUMAN HISTORY

Daniel 10 – 12

Daniel 10

Daniel's serious intent

Even in old age it is possible to remain seriously determined to find and do God's will.

We come now to the climax, the great moment at the end of Daniel. It comes in the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia when Daniel is given a revelation and a message. Ezra quotes Cyrus referring to the Lord as 'God of heaven', but this does not mean that Cyrus knew the Lord. More likely it reflects Cyrus' political acumen. The Bible says that he was raised up by God as an instrument of the the divine will.

These last chapters are deeply personal to Daniel. They are written in the first person: 'I, Daniel'. They are a reflection of who he is and the struggles he is going to have. Daniel, clearly elderly at this point, is grappling with age, disappointment and the fact that he is in captivity. He is also wrestling with human need as well as the immensity of the vision he receives. This chapter focuses on the great man Daniel and the great man he sees. It is largely a reflection on who Daniel is.

Daniel determined to seek God (verses 1–3)

Daniel is a man of serious intent. He is in mourning (perhaps because he has heard bad news from Jerusalem – see Ezra 3:12 – 4:5), has gone without any choice food (no meat or wine has touched his lips), and has used no lotion at all. In the ancient Babylonian world make-up and health and beauty were far advanced. In the dry, hot climate lotions had been used for centuries to prevent skin

cracking. They were used not so much by common people but by those, like Daniel, in positions of authority and power. So Daniel goes without everything, apart from the basics. He eats enough to stay alive, but is so serious about seeking God that he gives up inessentials.

Daniel's humility (verses 4–21)

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month Daniel sees a man before him. The vision he sees is dramatic and shocking. So much so that Daniel is left weak, overwhelmed and helpless. His strength is gone and he can hardly breathe (verse 17).

The messenger has come in response to Daniel's prayers (verse 12). He knows Daniel's serious intent. The words 'set your mind to gain understanding' is an interesting Hebrew phrase meaning, 'since you determined above everything else to gain understanding'. Then we see Daniel's humility as he bows with his face to the ground while listening to the message. Daniel is the second most powerful man in the empire, yet he positions himself as a servant in the face of this angelic visitor. He is determined to hear from God about himself and the future.

We see here Daniel's two great characteristics. First, he is serious about his relationship with God. As we have seen, he is determined in his mind to seek the Lord, even so far as to go without food where necessary. Second, he is humble. These two things characterize women and men of God today. If we want to do business with God, if we're serious about meeting Jesus and knowing him and receiving his power, we will be serious in intent and humble in approach. These two things can never be avoided.

That is not to say we can't have fun, of course. We are supposed to be a celebratory people, but in the end we have to be serious about our intention to seek God. Serious intent and humility should also characterize the life of the church facing the task of winning a community for Jesus. Do we really want people to know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord? Do we mind that some people don't

know him? Are we serious about discovering his will for their lives in the future?

Second, are we humble in our relationships? There's a danger of arrogance, believing we've got it right and everybody else hasn't. Daniel, being second in command in the empire, had great cause for arrogance, but he was humble, a powerful example for all time.

Questions

1. Compare Daniel 10:5–12 with Revelation 1:13–18; note the description of the visions and its effect on the recipients. Why did people need these mind-blowing visions?
2. What can we do to show that we 'want to do business with God'? Does the phrase fill you with alarm, joy or what? How far does advancing age alter your response?
3. How much in earnest are we, as a group, to win a community for Jesus? How do we set about it?
4. There are many godly statesmen like Daniel in positions of power and responsibility today. They need all the support they can get. How can we give it?

Important doctrine: Fasting

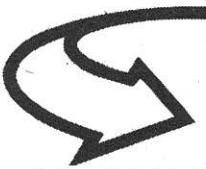
In the Bible fasting generally means going without all food and drink for a period of time. There were specific annual days of corporate fasting (such as the Day of Atonement), and other occasional fasts, which could be individual or corporate. Fasting was a way for people to humble themselves and open themselves to the work of God, acknowledging their dependence on him for everything. Some would fast in repentance, others in grief and others while seeking God's help and guidance. Fasting was both a symbol of humility and a spiritual discipline. Jesus took part in the annual fasts and expected his disciples to do so after he had left them (Matthew 9:14–16).

Fasting is not an end in itself to make our piety look impressive in the sight of others. The prophets made it clear that fasting was no use without right behaviour (e.g. Isaiah 58:5–12). Jesus told his hearers that fasting should lead us to think of God rather than ourselves (Matthew 6:16–18).

Daniel 11

A world in decay

Militarism and political intrigue are built into human society.



The Bible was not originally composed in the short sections we find in the Crossway Bible Guides! Nowhere is this truism more apparent than in what we call Daniel 11. It is a very long chapter, which records the twists and turns of political history over the five hundred years or so between the times of Daniel and Jesus. Readers wishing to trace the details of these twists and turns are referred to the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, *Daniel*, by Joyce Baldwin (IVP, 1978). The rest of us may well be content with an overview. This prophecy in chapter 11 deals with three major themes:

- The breakdown of the Babylonian and Persian empires and the rise of the Greek and Roman empires.
- Hints about the period between the first and second coming of Christ, a time still to come for us.
- Human sin will be evident in the whole of history,

wars will always happen and distress will be always with us.

Where lies our future?

As the second coming approaches and the devil thrashes around in desperation, knowing that his ultimate destiny is death and defeat, there will be evidence of great wickedness in the world. It will show itself in opposition to God and his church and in the reality of evil. Let's make no mistake here. Christians are not sentimentalists, thinking that the world will drift along, getting better and better in some vague sense. Our religion is not centred on pie in the sky. We are deadly serious about sin in the world and the sickness of the nations of the world. That is why we need a Saviour to come and do something about it. It's no use saying, 'Let's just be nice to each other,' because we don't have the power to be, and we won't save the world by mere niceness.

At the heart of the Christian reconciliation message is a bloody death on a cross. It needs the horror of a Roman crucifixion to expose the horror of human evil. Jesus came, not as a sentimental, 'please be nice to one another' kind of person, but to face death so that the world might know there is an antidote to its horror. The call to us is to engage with that death of Jesus, find it real for ourselves and live out the values of the Prince of Peace in this grim world. It is a great challenge.

Digging deeper: Antiochus Epiphanes

In verse 21 of Daniel 11 we are introduced to a 'contemptible person'. Contemptible or not, he dominates the rest of the chapter. Commentators almost all agree that he was Antiochus Epiphanes. He ruled the Greek empire from 175 to 164 BC as Antiochus IV and gave himself the

title Epiphanes, '(god) manifest'. He was anxious to impose all things Greek on his empire, which at this time included the Jews. Coming to Jerusalem in 167, he entered the Holy of Holies, carried off some of the precious articles and built a Greek altar there. Pigs were slaughtered in the temple, and a strong tradition suggests that the Jews were forced to eat pork, a terrible disobedience to God's law. This incident came to be known as the 'Abomination of Desolation' and no doubt explains why such a 'contemptible' man should be so prominent in Daniel's vision. He has become known as an archetype of Antichrist, the opposer of God in all things holy.

It is significant that when Jesus was talking to his disciples about the end of the age he said, 'when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination which causes desolation", spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains' (Matthew 24:15–16). By his comment 'let the reader understand' Matthew seems to be asking us to anticipate an event like that of 167 BC. This may well have referred to the destruction of the temple, with the whole city of Jerusalem, in AD 70. Perhaps this kind of thing will happen again in our future.

Questions

1. Make a list of the things you have learned from the book of Daniel so far. If anything needs to be acted on, how will you set about it?
2. How would you answer someone who says that the specific detail found in Daniel 11 could not have been foretold, so it must have been written after the events described? Does it matter either way? Why? Why not?
3. Is the world in decay or has it always been in an equally bad way? How much are the media to blame in forming our views on crime, immorality, global warming, drug and alcohol abuse and so on?
4. Antiochus Epiphanes has been associated with the

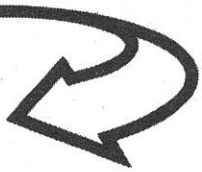
archetypal 'Antichrist'. Is there a candidate for that title today? Perhaps a regime or organization might be a corporate, rather than individual, Antichrist. Which might that be?

Daniel 12

The end of the world

We are given broad reassurance about the end of all things, but no exact details.

The window is opened (verses 1–4)



This final chapter is both surprisingly clear and frustratingly complicated. For those who want to understand all the small print, as it were, this is bad news. For those who will accept the wider picture in faith and leave the details for later it is very good news. First, then, the good news.

The Old Testament says little about everlasting life (although you might like to look at Job 19:25–27; Psalms 16:10–11; 49:14–15; Isaiah 26:9; and Ezekiel 37). But verses 2 and 3 of this chapter give some clear statements about what we are to expect at the end. We might almost think that the apostle Paul was writing. But details are in short supply. There will be great distress and those 'whose name is found written in the book' (verse 1) (who are they?) will be delivered. Will this be before the great distress, during it or after it? We would love to know. But at this point Daniel is told to close the book and, by implication, ask no more questions. Leave it to the 'many' (verse 4) to rush about looking for more knowledge of these things.

The window is closed (verses 5–13)

'Two others' appear (verse 5) and tantalizingly discuss the timescale for the end times. Daniel can't resist interrupting, but is told to be off and ask no more questions (verse 9). How much trouble could have been avoided if Christians had heeded this order! Those who try to calculate the date of the end of the world should take note, and, if this is not enough, hear our Lord's words, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set' (Acts 1:7) and, 'No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Matthew 24:36).

Right at the end of this chapter is a lovely promise of Daniel's destiny. 'You [Daniel] will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.' In other words, 'Daniel, you're going to be all right. You feel weak and old and frail and struggling; you have seen the future and it looks grim; but you, Daniel, will rise to life. You will get your reward because you have walked with me and sought me. You are in the eternal reward department!'

How about us?

Where do we fit in? Our final destiny is in verse 2: 'Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.' A destiny awaits the whole of this planet. Sick people, evil people, nice people and good people – in the end, God will sort us into two categories. Matthew 25:31–46 describes this as the 'sheep' and 'goats' experience!

The destiny of the planet is in God's hands. Our destiny is secure. We are going to rise to eternal life. Even with all our pains and problems, difficulties and sadness we can face life with a rugged resilience, knowing that this is our destiny. We are going to arise to eternal life and live with God for ever and ever and ever. What an encouragement!

Now you may feel beleaguered, fed up, or things are difficult and life may not seem to be going well, but know that if you follow Christ faithfully, eternal life and blessing await you.

Questions

1. There is great curiosity about what life will be like after death. What do you want to know about it? Why? Someone has said that we don't know what we will meet when we die but we do know *whom* we will meet. How much does this help us?
2. If there are details in the Bible that we are not meant to understand, why do you think they are there?
3. Many people today will say, 'These prophecies and promises may well be true for you, but not for us, because we don't believe in God.' What might our response be?

For further reading

The book of Daniel has stimulated some strange ideas, so we do well to be careful in our reading! You may find the following commentaries useful:

Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series (IVP, 1978). This is a short and straightforward commentary, but one containing lots of useful information and wise comments on the text.

Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, in the New International Version Application Commentary series (Hodder & Stoughton, 1999). This book explores not only the original meaning of the text, but also its significance for us today.

Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, in the Apollos Old Testament Commentary series (Apollos, 2002). This is a more scholarly commentary, but you do not need a theology degree or a knowledge of Hebrew to use and benefit from it.